

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0186

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: WILL THE P.Q. SELF-DESTRUCT?

1. SPEAKER OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CLEMENT RICHARD, MENTIONED IN CONFIDENCE YESTERDAY HIS CONCERN THAT THE PQ GOVERNEMENT MAY BE ANTAGONIZING INDIVIDUALLY LIMITED BUT CUMULATIVELY IMPORTANT NUMBERS OF VOTERS BY PROPOSING TOO MUCH CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION EARLY IN THEIR FIRST TERM IN OFFICE. IF TREND CONTINUES, RICHARD FEARS NUMBERS ALIENATED COULD ULTIMATELY ENDANGER CHANCES OF HOLDING SUCCESSFUL REFERENDUM ON CENTRAL PQ OBJECTIVE OF POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY.

2. COMMENT: RICHARD HAS IDENTIFIED PROBLEM WHICH COULD BE CRUCIAL, NOT ONLY TO SUCCESS OF REFERENDUM, BUT TO SURVIVAL OF PQ. SOCIAL REFORMISTS WITHIN PARTY ARE PRESSING FOR EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF HEAVY LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM RANGING FROM CELEBRATED LANGUAGE BILL TO GOVERNMENT AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE SCHEME. TAKEN BY THEMSELVES, NONE OF THESE MEASURES IS LIKELY ENLIST OPPOSITION OF MAJORITY OF QUEBEC VOTERS. HOWEVER, RICHARD'S CONCERN FOR THEIR CUMULATIVE AFFECT MAY BE WELL FOUNDED.

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3. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, WE BELIEVE PQ MUST GAIN SUPPORT OF LARGE PORTION OF 40 PERCENT OF POPULATION ESTIMATED TO BE UNCOMMITTED IN QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE IF IT IS TO SUCCEED IN REFERENDUM AND/OR EVEN RETAIN POWER. POOR PERFORMANCE AND PROSPECTS OF ECONOMY NOW PRECLUDE MANY POTENTIALLY POPULAR BUT COSTLY LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES. ON CONTRARY, BUDGET RESTRAINTS HAVE FORCED GOVERNMENT TO TAKE UNPOPULAR

MEASURES TO RESTRICT EXPENDITURES IN MANY SENSITIVE AREAS. MOREOVER, THERE APPEARS BE A GROWING DISENCHANTMENT AMONG ORGANIZED LABOR WITH PQ. THUS, SHOULD PQ CONTINUE TO ACCUMULATE ENEMIES, THE LEVESQUE GOVERNMENT COULD WIND-UP LOSING THE SUPPORT OF MANY VOTERS WHO ARE SYMPATHETIC OR POTENTIALLY SYMPATHETIC TO ITS NATIONALIST GOALS BUT ALIENATED FROM PARTY FOR A VARIETY OF OTHER REASONS.

4. LEVESQUE NO DOUBT IS ATTUNED TO POTENTIAL SERIOUSNESS OF PROBLEM. HOWEVER, AS POINTED OUT IN QUEBEC 0031, HE HAS DIFFICULT, OFTEN CONTRADICTORY TASK OF SATISFYING A CLIENTELLE WITH WIDELY DIVERGENT INTERESTS. ONE IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN HIS BALANCING ACT MUST BE TO CONTROL THE ENTHUSIASM FOR IMMEDIATE WIDE RANGING AND EXPENSIVE SOCIAL REFORM WHICH HAS BEEN AROUSED BY STRONG TONIC OF UNEXPECTED ELECTORAL VICTORY AND ASSUMPTION OF POLITICAL POWER. ON ONE HAND, HE RUNS RISK OF DIVIDING PARTY AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD HE APPEAR OPPOSE SOCIAL REFORMS CHERISHED BY IMPORTANT ELEMENTS AMONG PARTY MILITANTS. ON OTHER, HE COULD ALIENATE DECISIVE SEGMENT OF MODERATE TO CONSERVATIVE UNCOMMITTED FRANCOPHONE VOTERS WHOSE SUPPORT IS VITAL TO SURVIVAL OF GOVERNMENT AND TO REALIZATION OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY AMBITIONS SHOULD GOQ ACQUIRE RADICAL, FISCALLY IRRESPONSIBLE IMAGE. AT PRESENT, THIS MORE BASIC CHALLENGE TO PQ IS MASKED BY DRAMATIC LANGUAGE DEBATE. ULTIMATELY, HOWEVER, IT COULD BE MORE DECISIVE THAN LANGUAGE CONTROVERSY WITH FRANCOPHONE MAJORITY WHO WILL IN LAST INSTANCE DECIDE QUEBEC'S FUTURE.

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